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## **The Becoming and Changing of Parenthood**

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# The Becoming and Changing of Parenthood: Immigrant and Refugee Parents' Narratives of Learning Different Parenting Practices

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In an age where parenting has become a central concern for education and policy makers, there is an increased effort to ensure 'good' parenting practices amongst immigrant and refugee parents. The article argues that there is an uprise of interventions aimed at teaching new parenting practices to these parents, building on deficit assumptions. These interventions are critiqued from a poststructuralist perspective arguing that they build on a narrow school-centric and normative understanding of good parenting. However, it is pointed out, that this critique does not provide a way forward that allows for immigrant and refugee parents to transcend marginalization. The article draws on an analysis of empirical material from a parent-intervention project in a social housing community with a high density of ethnic minority families. The analysis investigates the narratives of how parents learn to do parenting differently. Drawing on social practice theory in general and situated learning theory in particular, the article argues that rather than attempting to change the knowledge of parents, home-family-community relationships can and should be strengthened through situated changes of practice that open up for new ways of social interaction and allow for changes in parenting practices that are experienced as meaningful by the parents.

This article investigates how immigrant and refugee parents describe moments and processes in which they changed their practice of parenting. There has, over the past 20 or so years, been an increase in the political focus on parenting (Popkewitz, 2003). This increased interest in parenting is connected to the increased focus on learning and school achievement (Biesta, 2009), in a globalized world that is becoming increasingly complex and uncertain. As Lewis (2011) writes, "[Learning] emphasizes outputs and performance assessments in order to meet the constantly changing needs of the economy" (p. 592). Research shows that increased parental involvement as well as 'good' parenting practices result in increased school achievement (Deforges & Abouchers 2003), consequently resulting in an extensive focus on parenting practices. As Epstein (1996) writes: "We have moved from the question, Are families important for student success in schools? To If families are important for children's development and school success, how can schools help all families conduct the activities that will benefit their children?" (p. 213).

Parents are viewed as teacher-assistants who must support the work of teachers in order to produce satisfactory educational outcomes (Dannesboe et. al. 2012). As Keogh (1996) writes: "Parents are instructed in what and how to see, [...] being positioned as adjunct teachers" (p. 130).

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There are, however, some groups of parents who are not considered adequate or suitable “assistants” or “partners”. These parents include ethnic minority parents such as immigrant or refugee parents (Matthiesen, 2015). Much research is devoted to delineating the parental involvement of ethnic minority parents as well as describing barriers and challenges to involvement (e.g. Bitew & Ferguson, 2010; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Intxausti, Etxeberria & Joaristi, 2013). This tradition of research points out that immigrant and refugee parents tend to lack knowledge of the system, of what is expected of them, and of how to go about parenting in a way appropriate in their new country of residence (e.g. Bitew & Ferguson, 2010; Ibrahim, Small & Grimley, 2009; Ladky & Peterson, 2009; McBrien, 2011; Rah, Choi & Nguyễn, 2009). This focus on lack of sufficient knowledge has resulted in research approaches which focus on interventions and training programs intended to strengthen and increase parental involvement by ensuring that parents have the sufficient know-how and competencies to engage satisfactorily in their children’s education (Knudsen & Andersen, 2014). Despite the egalitarian and emancipatory ambition embedded in these approaches, they have been critiqued for building on a deficit approach to these parents (Knudsen & Andersen, 2014; Matthiesen, 2016), overlooking the parental engagement that characterizes ethnic minority families (Carreón, Drake & Barton, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007; López, 2001) and adhering to school-centric notions of parental involvement (Theodorou, 2008).

However, the arrival of new-comers in a society requires change. The upholding of status quo results in marginalization, as it counteracts engagement (Crozier & Davies, 2007). We therefore need to ask the question of who and what must change, as well as how is it, that we can work on facilitating social transformation and ensuring emancipation of immigrant and refugee parents to counter marginalization processes in a way that allows for the unique existence of the parental subject? But what kind of change does this require? This article addresses a small aspect of this problematic, by investigating how immigrant and refugee parents describe their moments and processes of changing their parenting practices in a way that they believe is necessary to support their children in a Danish educational context. It is shown that these processes of change are sometimes ascribed meaning and often include changes in the institutional practice, whilst other changes are considered changes that are forced upon the family in an unhelpful manner, that point out oppressive power dynamics embedded in social structures. The article draws on empirical material from research investigating a project in a social housing area in a larger city in Denmark. The project is called “Parent Academy” and is a parent intervention intended to teach parents about ‘good’ parenting practices in an assimilatory perspective, as well as facilitate dialogue between parents and personnel from schools and daycare in the area. This article draws on material from participant observations from these Parent Academy evenings including informal conversations with parents, teachers and daycare pedagogues. In addition, the article draws on individual formal interviews conducted with 6 immigrant and refugee parents from a variety of nations, namely: Congo, Lebanon, Somalia, Kenya, Turkey and India.

The point of departure is a discussion of the uprise of these parental programs and interventions and the subsequent critique of these. This is followed by a discussion of this critique rooted in poststructuralists approaches as well as other social transformation theories. It is argued that poststructuralist theories are useful regarding analysis of the reproduction of social practices, subjectivities and possibilities for actions. They are, however, limited when analyzing processes of change. Consequently, it is argued that the theory of situated learning

allows for an approach to this field that analyzes both restrictions and possibilities of social change and transcending marginalization.

## INTERVENTIONS AND CRITIQUE

As suggested in the introduction, much research is devoted to uncovering the reasons for the lack of parental involvement of immigrant and refugee parents in their children's education. This research shows that immigrant and refugee parents tend to have a lack of knowledge of what is expected of them and how to live up to their parental responsibilities in their new country of residence (Dennesen, Bakker & Gierveld, 2007; Vera, et. al., 2012; Bitew & Ferguson, 2010; Ibrahim, Small & Grimley, 2009). For instance, Bitew and Ferguson (2010) write that in Ethiopia parents traditionally only contact schools when there are severe problems with the child. Consequently, Ethiopian immigrant parents in the US tended not to contact the schools, unless they thought there was a serious issue that needed to be addressed. Additionally, researchers find that many immigrant and refugee parents are perceived both by teachers and by themselves as lacking the necessary skills and competencies in order to adequately support their children either because of language difficulties, own educational attainment, computer illiteracy and/or time issues due to strenuous work hours (Greenberg, 2012; McBrien, 2011; Ladky & Peterson, 2009; Bitew & Ferguson, 2010; Rivera, 2008; Ibrahim, Small & Grimley, 2009).

This literature often recommends certain interventions to counteract these perceived deficits, resulting in an uprise of programs and interventions intended to ensure that immigrant and refugee parents have the adequate know-how and skills to support their children. Stanton-Salazar (1997) argues that new immigrant parental involvement correlates with their "learning to decode the system" (p. 13), which encourages teaching parents to navigate in the system in a school-centered manner. An example of this kind of intervention can be found in Robin (2008), who conducted an intervention study where parents in an English-as-second-language class were taught parental involvement skills including dialogue skills, culminating in a meeting with a school principal. Melzi, Paratore, and Krol-Sinclair (2000) report on a study of immigrant Latino mothers who participated in an intergenerational literacy program. The study reported an increased incidence of mothers' storybook reading with their children at home. Other examples of intervention programs include computer literacy training as much parent-teacher communication is digital through email, online portals or digital announcements (Machado-Casas, Sánchez & Ez, 2014). For instance, Rivera (2008) describes a computer literacy intervention program where Spanish speaking immigrant parent learnt to use technology for family advancement in a Learning Community Center.

The focus on the lack of know-how and skills that form the basis of these interventions and programs can be critiqued for adhering to a deficit logic where immigrant and refugee parents are considered inadequate as parents, often regarding both disciplinary strategies and academic support abilities (Matthiesen, 2016). Crozier & Davies (2007) draw on Dale's (1996) typology, namely the expert model and the transplant model to describe these deficit oriented approaches:

1. In the **expert model** the professional is the expert who has the knowledge that is considered valuable. Ravn (2011) draws on a similar analytical concept which she terms the "compensation rationale." She argues that based on the notion that the teachers are

the experts and the parents lack sufficient skills and competencies, the schools compensate for any insufficient or lacking skills and competencies shown by the parents. Thus, the experts assume responsibilities that are typically thought of as parental responsibilities such as homework support. This distances parents and undermines their perspectives.

2. In the **transplantation model** professionals teach their skills and expertise to parents and thereby help them become more successful as parents supporting their children's education. This is the model that is employed in the intervention programs intended to teach immigrant and refugee parents necessary knowledge and skills. The intervention project that this article draws its empirical material from, is an example of this transplantation model, where 'experts' on culture and parenting are intended to teach immigrant/refugee parents how to do well in their country of residence. Crozier and Davies (2007) argue that although the transplantation model is a strategy intended for empowerment of parents it still locates the balance of power within the hands of the professional adhering to an assimilation logic and placing the demand of change on the parents.

These interventions that seek to empower parents through changing their cultural capital are thus problematic as they implicitly draw on a deficit understanding of these parents and their parenting practices. Lightfoot (2004) likewise argues, that middle-class parents are considered *a priori* resources that may be drawn upon whereas immigrant and refugee parents are considered deficient and in need of input and help before they can be thought of as resources:

*"... middle-class parents are seen as overflowing containers, whose involvement in schools is to be valued...contrasted with low-income, urban parents who speak English as a second language and who are portrayed as empty containers, which need to be filled before they can give anything of value to the schools or their own offspring"* (Lightfoot, 2004, p. 93).

The parental strategies of immigrants and refugees are thus not considered merely *different* but rather they are considered *wrong*. As Guo (2012) writes, "A deficit model of difference leads to beliefs that difference is equal to deficiency, and that the knowledge of others – particularly those from developing countries – is incompatible, inferior, and hence invalid" (p. 123). Others point out that in order to be considered responsible parents, they must respond to the call of the schools in a school-centric manner, i.e. 'good parents' are defined by their ability to respond to the demands of the school (Knudsen, 2009; Matthiesen, 2015; Theodorou, 2008).

### **Alternative Approaches to Social Change**

The above critique (typically drawing on poststructuralist perspectives rooted in either Foucault or Bourdieu) points out problems of unequal power, of incommensurate opportunities of participation, of marginalization processes and subjectification processes producing identities as second-order parents (see for instance Lareau, 1987 and Lareau & Horvat, 1999). This critique is very important and research must continue to take up a poststructuralist perspective in this field. However, the problem with the above critique is that it provides no path forward. They are theories of reproduction. They are theories of

reproduction. Bourdieu focus' on various forms of economic, social and cultural capital that are necessary in order to 'play the game' (Bourdieu, 1990) and be recognized as a 'good' or adequate participant in a particular practice. These cultural elements mediate the relationship between economic and societal structures, schooling practices and the lived lives of persons (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Children acquire knowledge, skills, manners and styles of interaction through their family life which reproduces dominant forms of being in various social classes and groups. Furthermore, a central point is, that this reproduces inequality. For instance, children who read books and visit museums learn the dominant culture of the educational system and are thus rewarded, whilst schools systematically devalue the norms and forms of being of other classes and groups (Mehan, 1992).

Ogbu (1982) argues, like Bourdieu, that the major differences in school experiences between certain groups can be explained by the continuity and discontinuity between home and school. This is therefore the driving rationale between the above described interventions that try to teach parents to do parenting differently in order to reduce this discontinuity between home and school. But as Mehan writes:

*"[o]ne conclusion that could be drawn from this analysis [based on the work of Bourdieu] would be this: Change the cultural capital of the low-income family. Increase bedtime reading, the density of known-information questions at home, and so forth. This would be the wrong inference, however, because it is based on the tacit assumption that the prevailing language use and socialization practices of linguistic and ethnic minority children are deficient."* (Mehan, 1992, p. 7).

The approach that attempts to increase the cultural capital of certain families requires assimilation: it requires becoming like the dominant class. However, this approach merely sustains marginalization, as such assimilation-demands devalues the forms of being, as well as the values and ideals found in other groups. Berry (1997) distinguishes between four acculturation strategies: *assimilation*, which requires adopting the norms of the dominant culture, *segregation*, which is defined by the choice to separate from the dominant culture in order to maintain one's own norms and values, *integration*, where both original norms and new ones are juggled simultaneously, and *marginalization*, which is an involuntary mode of being isolated from participating in dominant cultural practices. A discussion of Berry's concept is beyond the scope of this article, but his notion of the connection between assimilation and marginalization is useful in this context. He writes, that people, "become marginalized as a result of forced assimilation combined with forced exclusion (segregation)" (Berry, 1997, p. 10). Marginalization thus occurs, when the dominant society insists on the assimilation of new comers, and when they fail to live up to these requirements (due to various reasons, some of which will become clear in the analysis), they are not recognized as adequate parents and thus excluded from participating as such.

The question thus remains: how can low-income immigrant and refugee families transcend marginalization? How can home-school discontinuity be addressed and how can we foster processes of social change in a way that does not oppress the newcomer, does not insist on assimilation, does not marginalize them or stifle their uniqueness and personalized way of parenthood? As Denzin (2009) argues, pedagogical strategies should "empower people with a language and a set of pedagogical practices that turn oppression into freedom, despair into

hope, hatred into love, doubt into trust.” (p. 29).

Based on this empowerment-ideal, other approaches to interventions have been developed that focus on school-structures and organization as well as the possibility of dialogue. These approaches attempt to answer the call of Crozier and Davies (2007), who point out that immigrant and refugee parents are not “hard to reach” but rather the schools and teachers are difficult to gain access to for these parents. For instance, Boulanger et. al. (2014) describe a parental partnership program implemented in Quebec, Canada, that aims at creating “...spaces for social negotiation, for the construction of discourse and for the production of common sense knowledge” (p. 2). The program supports teachers in creating activities that build bridges between home and school (Boulanger, 2019, this Special Issue). Another resource-oriented approach, Funds of Knowledge, trained teachers in an ethnographic approach to parent-teacher relationships. The aim of the ethnographic approach is to help teachers recognize the strengths and resources of individual families and use these strategically in their teaching (Moll, et. al., 1992).

Dialogue thus becomes a key concept in these social transformation approaches. Building on a Freirian notion of a pedagogy of change, García-Carrión (2016) describes an intervention program grounded in dialogue. She argues that whilst there is a powerful tendency towards evidence-based solutions in schools, the transformative role in education should instead be based on dialogue “as a critical tool to privilege the voices of those systematically excluded in the process of knowledge construction.” (García-Carrión, 2016, p. 155). Drawing on Vygotsky’s (1962) understanding of language being the “tool of tools for learning and development” (p. 157), she shows that community dialogue, based on egalitarian values, where argumentation rather than position and social structure, produced hope and social transformation. Similarly, Machado-Casas, Sánchez & Ez, (2014), in a computer literacy intervention for Latino/a immigrant parents, asked what skills they wanted to learn and how they would like to learn it, as full participants actively engaged in the creation of their learning process.

However, dialogue and language is merely a small part of what it means to be human, and does not transpire in a frictionless vacuum, but instead is situated in a specific practice. As Bourdieu (1990) thoroughly showed, much of lived lives is rooted in embodied activity in relations that includes, but does not consist entirely of, language. Instead, persons live their lives in and across different practices (Dreier, 2008). In order to understand the possibility of change that allows for transcending marginal positions, it is important to consider dialogue as well as other aspects that are constitutive of human being and becoming. Mørck (2007) argues that Foucauldian perspectives have no answer to the question of transcending marginalization because they have no theory of learning. Lave (1997) makes a similar argument about Bourdieu, pointing out that his theory of social practice concerns how persons “adjust to institutionally structured possibilities for individual action in the world.” (p. 147). Bourdieu’s theory is thus a theory of social reproduction and not a theory of change and transcending marginalization. Lave (1997) points out that this is because Bourdieu, like Foucault, does not have a theory of learning: “what is learned, and how is not addressed [in Bourdieu’s work]. People ‘acquire’ cultural capital. But how? They acquire most basically the habitus they share with others of their social class. How?” (Lave, 1997, p. 147).

According to Lave, what Bourdieu lacks, is an understanding of persons as active *participants*

interacting intentionally and purposefully with one-another in social relations. In the following section, Lave's social practice theory of learning will be described, providing the basis for an analysis of how transcending marginalization as parents can be understood as changing participation in changing social practices. However, due to Lave's focus on apprenticeship learning her theory of change has an overt focus on the newcomer as the center for change, where 'experts' or 'master' hold the knowledge worth knowing and worth aspiring for. This tends to downplay the dynamics of power that are at stake in a given practice. In order to address power dynamics and the conflicts and contradictions inherent in processes of change, Klaus Holzkamp's notion of expansive and restrictive learning is described in the following.

## **LEARNING AS AN EXPANSIVE PROCESS OF CHANGE IN SOCIAL PRACTICES**

Situated learning theory (Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991) is rooted in social practice theory arguing that persons live their lives in a world that is formed of historically, socially and politically structured practices. In this perspective, "we are always already 'thrown' into a concrete situation, in a way we cannot get out of or behind, or get completely under our control." (Lave & Packer, 2008, p. 31). Persons thus participate in practices where their possibilities for action and activity is already structured. At the same time, social practices are (re)produced and changed through the active participation of persons with particular concerns and orientations living their lives with other active participants (Dreier, 2008). Social life thereby is a matter of its constitutive relations, i.e. historically, politically, economically and socially produced ways of meaningful participation available to each person in a given practice.

In this perspective, learning is considered a transformation facet of everyday life; an expansion of individual possibilities of participation in changing social practices. Rather than viewing learning as an epistemological problem of acquiring knowledge, beliefs and skills, learning is conceived of as radically relational. Through critiquing a Cartesian dualistic approach to learning where knowledge is understood as something that can be acquired, learning is in a social practice perspective rooted in a social historical ontology of human being-in-practice (Lave, 1997). The situated learning approach is thus a critique of the notion that learning requires formal teaching: "It is a mistake to think of learning as a special kind of activity, taking place only at particular times in special places arranged for it" (Lave & Packer, 2008, p. 19). Furthermore, learning is related to identity. It is about becoming more and more of a certain kind of person, or alternatively less of a certain person (Wenger, 1998).

Learning is on the other hand not conceived of as mere simple socialization. Socialization involves imitation, repetitive and unreflective doing as well as mechanical reproduction of routines (Lave & Packer, 2008). Learning thus involves active participants in social worlds engaged in particular purposes connected to the practice, each with particular and significant concerns and orientations (Dreier, 2008). It is through active participation of engaged (unique) persons that worlds are (re)produced but also changed. It is therefore not merely about reproduction of social worlds but in a significant sense involves transformation of social worlds and the possibility of transcending marginalization. Learning is thus as much about difference as sameness. Holland and Lave (2001) point out that change is produced through the dynamic interplay of difference. Learning does not happen as a frictionless movement from legitimate peripheral participation to more central participation as Lave and Wenger's (1991) book on situated learning may at first glance suggest. Instead learning is negotiated change of



participation in practices, that, through these negotiations, consequently too must change. Learning is therefore not (necessarily) about following fixed trajectories and reaching predetermined goals, acquiring predetermined skills or knowledge. Instead it is about transformation that grows out of complex social relations in changing practices.

Furthermore, learning to participate in certain practices is often uncritically valorized but not all learning expands possibilities of participation in a way that is considered meaningful for the participants. Often, newcomers do not have a lot of possibilities for acting upon the practice, and there is an inherent risk of process of change being merely about becoming like dominant others in a given practice. Learning thus collapses into assimilation – it is the newcomer who must change. Holzkamp (1983) develops a useful distinction between expansive learning and restrictive learning. Expansive learning involves developing new potentials for action and activity based on personal motives to learn, whereas restrictive learning involves being forced to certain activity for specific reasons in the practice. An example of restrictive learning can be found in Lave and Wengers (1991) description of butcher apprentices, who were denied access to backroom work, being forced to take care of shop-activities due to an economic rationale of the butchery owners. This restricted their possibilities of expanding their skills as butchers. Expansive learning, however, generates new possibilities for participation associated with the motives of the subject. For instance, Nielsen (2008a) showed how female baker apprentices in a gendered workspace where women traditionally were marginalized participants, found new ways of participating in bakeries through the introduction of new ovens and more flexible work hours due to an increased demand for bakery-goods throughout the day rather than merely in the mornings. This enabled the women to handle ovens that previously were too heavy as well as enabling them to handle the challenge of bakery-work and taking care of family-life. It is important to notice that these changes in participation required change of socio-material conditions, i.e. it is not an individualized conception of change requiring the acquisition of new knowledge and/or internal motives. Nielsen (2008b) stresses that learning connected to personal meaning is not primarily an intra-psychological process, but rather connected to personal participation in a social world. Expansive learning is thus about changing participation connected to the subject's particular concerns and orientation in changing practices. Although Nielsen (2008a) shows that learning in social practices is possible, he asserts that "change and transformation does take place, but slowly and incrementally" (Nielsen, 2008a, p. 187).

## **METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The material analyzed in this article is produced as part of a larger ongoing project in a social housing area (an area with a high density of immigrant and refugee parents) where a municipality funded social project entitled "Parent Academy" was started in February 2016. The project consists of a series of evenings where parents and a few invited personnel from the daycare institutions and schools in the area meet together in the areas "Health House" (a community building with a cafeteria, several available rooms for meetings, as well as doctor's offices etc.). The meetings consist of teaching about a certain topic (e.g. how to handle conflicts) and encourages dialogue along the way. Child care is provided and dinner is served half way through the meeting. The researcher participated in the Parent Academy evenings, taking field notes and talking informally to parents and to the daycare and school personnel. Formal interviews were subsequently conducted with selected parents and personnel.

The analysis in this article draws on material from the Parent Academy evenings and from interviews with personnel, but it draws primarily on formal individual interviews with 6 refugee and immigrant parents (3 fathers and 3 mothers). These parents had lived in Denmark between 7 and 30 years. They came from a variety of countries: Congo, Lebanon, Somalia, Kenya, Turkey and India. They all spoke Danish well at a conversational level, although they all spoke with thick accents and at times struggled to find adequate words. 3 of the interviewed parents were immigrants, arriving voluntarily in Denmark, whereas 3 were refugees, forced to move due to war. 2 of the fathers worked as bilingual liaisons at a school, 1 father worked as a construction worker, all 3 mothers were students. The additional parents that attended the Parent Academy evenings were also from a variety of countries, a variety of ages and number of years of residency in Denmark (including a group of fathers who had arrived from Syria very recently). These parents also varied in language skills and employment including many on social welfare. The interviewed parents were chosen on convenience based on a good relationship established during the Parent Academy evenings. Additionally, their relatively good language skills enabled interviews without a translator, strengthening the quality of the interviews. However, the interviewed group consist of a comparatively strong group that all do well in society, and thus may have a rather privileged experience of parenting in Denmark as an immigrant/refugee parent. Nonetheless, for the particular question of learning to do parenting differently that concerns this article, this group is an interesting and acceptable group, as they have experienced great changes in parenting practices, and are able to reflect on this process as well as the difficulties and inadequacies of this process.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed drawing on inspiration from Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. The interviews broadly investigated the experience of doing parenthood as an immigrant/refugee parent in a Danish context. The research question of how do immigrant/refugee parents describe their process of learning to do parenting in ways different from their own upbringing, was formulated before the interviews were conducted. The question functioned as both a reference point when designing the interview guide and as an analytical question guiding the analysis. The interviewees were asked to describe their childhood families and their relationship to their parents as well as their current families and how they went about their role as parents. When describing their own approaches to parenting they were asked supplement questions such as, "How did you know to do it like that?" or "How did you know that this was a good approach to solving that problem?" The interview was semi-structured and explorative, with few pre-defined questions. The analysis was conducted by systematically condensing meaning units and thereby creating themes from the patterns found. The themes were thus derived from the data. New meaningful wholes were created, by clustering similar condensations, and assigning a representative theme. The stories and quotations singled out in the following are those which best illustrate the points drawn from the analysis. All names are pseudonyms.

## **ANALYSIS**

In the following section the results of the analysis are presented. Firstly, there is a description of how the participants described their childhood homes. Subsequently, results are presented in two sections: a section describing the participants' narratives of expansive learning, i.e. changes in practices that were meaningful to them, and a section describing the participants'

narratives of restrictive learning, i.e. narratives of changes which they felt forced to but find problematic.

### **A Different Childhood Family**

In all the interviews the parents described that there were great differences in the way their parents raised them compared to the way they raise their own children. All of them described their childhood homes as homes where there was much respect for the adults stressing an authoritarian parenting style. All of them had been used to corporal punishment and strict sanctions such as grounding. There were clear rules in most of the families such as strict curfew hours and clear expectations regarding schoolwork as well housework chores. In Cemil's case, growing up in urban Turkey, he spent much of his time away from school working in his uncle's tailor workshop. This clarity and organized childhood life, however, was not the case for Samir, who spent much of his childhood without his parents in a village in Somalia, where he drifted from relative to relative in an ad hoc manner. But even in his case, there were clear expectations, such as taking proper care of one's clothing or taking responsibility for younger relatives. Samir describes how he made sure to take off his homemade slippers and placed them carefully at a safe distance when playing soccer to make sure nothing happened to them. He also describes a situation where a young cousin had eaten sand whilst in his care, which had resulted in a severe reprimand as well as corporal punishment.

Some of them expressed being afraid of their parent(s) (or the adults whom they were in the care of) because of this authoritarian approach. For instance, Nilusha said:

*"Every time I saw my father, I became afraid, if I had done something wrong. But it was, well, I was afraid of my father. But I could talk to him. But if we wanted something [like going out with friends] we talked to our mother who talked to our father for us."*

Two of the interviewed parents described, that it was only their father who was a harsh disciplinarian, whereas their mother was described as more lenient, caring and understanding. For instance, Cemil described a situation where his father had forbidden him to play soccer because it was influencing his schoolwork. Cemil, who played at an advanced level, had continued to play, hiding it from his father. His mother had aided him in this endeavor by washing his soccer kit and helping him sneak out of the house for practice.

However, they all expressed experiencing care and affection from their parents and caretakers. Mandy, having grown up in Nairobi in the care of her grandmother, describes how her grandmother, always made sure, they had what they (Mandy and her brother) needed. She was strict and tough but always protected them. Additionally, Mandy describes that her grandmother always spent time in the evenings showing interest in what challenges they were struggling with and was good at listening and giving advice. Samir also describes how the adults showed care and interest in the children's lives. In his case, it was mostly through storytelling. He describes a situation where he had been harshly disciplined by his uncle, but in the evening his uncle took great care to spend extra time telling stories around the fireplace.

The parents all described a need to parent in a different way in a Danish context. They described a different child-adult relationship, where a strict authoritarian approach to disciplining their

children is not possible, due to corporal punishment being against the law in Denmark. Their approach to parenting was more characterized by negotiation, listening, explaining, and by far less demands placed on the children than in their own childhoods. The interviews investigated how the parents described how they learnt to parent in ways different from how they themselves were raised, in an attempt to reduce discontinuity between home and school. Some of the changes they described were considered meaningful and connected to the parent's own concerns and values (expansive learning) whereas some of the changes were considered problematic and were perceived as coming about as a result of being forced to parent differently (restrictive learning). In the following expansive learning experiences will be described first followed by descriptions of restrictive learning.

### **Expansive Learning**

*Neera: "If we try to raise our children the way we were raised, well, it would be very difficult for them"*

For the parents at the Parent Academy evenings and the interviewed parents, it was important and meaningful to learn new ways of doing parenthood that would support their children and give them the necessary skills and knowledge to do well in this new society of residence. They pointed out the need to make sure their children learnt to be independent, have opinions, work hard, feel loved, be confident, do well in school and so on. In the following, it is described how these parents explained their changes in parenting practices and how they learnt to do it differently in a way that is meaningful for them.

### **Access**

The parents described learning how to parent differently by experiencing other ways of being parents. Two mothers, Mandy and Nilusha, are both studying to be kindergarten pedagogues. They explained that they had learnt new parenting approaches through their internships in kindergartens and daycare centers where they saw how both the pedagogues and the parents tackled parenting. Neera, born in Congo and arriving in Denmark with her mother at the age of 17 as a refugee, explained that one of the greatest differences between her own childhood and the way she parented her own two children, was that adults did not show an active interest in the lives of children in her childhood home. She described that this could be seen at dinnertime where the adults would sit at the table and eat whilst the children either ate on the floor or in a different room. She had realized that in Denmark it was important to talk to her children and show an interest in their lives in order to give them the communication skills and independence necessary to do well in Denmark. When asked how she learnt this, she explained that she took a Danish high school course where she spent time visiting the families of the other students. During these visits she saw how Danish parents spoke to their children in a different way than what she had been accustomed to. Realizing that this was important for the development of her children in a Danish context, she and her husband make sure that they eat dinner sitting around the dining table with their children and spend time asking them about their day:

*"We have learnt to sit at the table as a family and talk together, also to the children. [...] When I visited the others I could see how they talked to each other and the parents were very attentive to their children and asked them, "Yes, what do you mean by that?"*

*In that way they got the children to have an independent opinion. That is how I learned."*

Nilusha explained, that she had learnt how to be a parent by using her mother as a role-model. Her mother, as opposed to her father, had always discussed issues with her and her sister, explaining why certain rules or sanctions were imposed on them:

*Nilusha: "It is from my mother. She taught us that it doesn't help to hit, because we just became more and more angry with our father. But our mother spoke to us. She talked to us and solved conflicts in that way. So I took that from my mother. [...] She tried to explain the situation, so that we could think for ourselves. [...] I think that it is important that you explain why you get angry."*

Samir, on the other hand, explained that he had learnt not to use corporal punishment as a father, because he had experienced this parenting approach as inimical and destructive. When asked if he could use his father as a role model in any way, he blankly dismissed the possibility. Instead he maintained that he used his negative childhood experiences with authoritarian parenting approach as a way of developing an approach to parenting where he spends much time explaining to his children why certain acts are not allowed. He told a story of how his son, Bilaal, had shot his sister with a toy gun. His sister had cried and Samir had talked to Bilaal explaining that it was painful. Additionally, he was told that Samir would take the toy, and give it to him when he was ready to play with it outside instead of in the apartment. When asked how he knew that this was a good approach to disciplining his son he said:

*"You remember the good things but also the bad things. And it is a special kind of pain when you get hit [...]. You become dizzy and have a ringing sound in your ears. When you have experienced how big an abusive it is, you would not wish it on your own children."*

Neera also explained, that she learnt a lot from discussing approaches related to specific issues with her children's kindergarten pedagogues. For instance, she describes that learnt that it was a good idea to let small children get dressed on their own to enhance their independence as well as ideas for bedtime rituals. She said:

*"There have been things that I have been told by the pedagogues saying your child needs to learn this and this, specific things. Try doing it in this way, [they say]."*

The discussions were thus related to concrete challenges that the pedagogues have paid attention to. Neera was very appreciative of this advice and sought it on her own asking them questions. Dialogue, and having access to the possibility of discussing concrete situations that have meaning in the everyday lives of parents and children, may thus be essential for the opportunity for transformation and transcending marginalization. As we shall see in the section on restrictive learning, dialogue is not necessarily a key to transcending marginalization as much dialogue requires adhering to particular cultural norms and values. This particular example is also illustrative of how the notion of expansive and restrictive learning may not be as clear cut a dichotomy as the analysis shows. The dialogue between Neera and the pedagogues may very well slide into directive assimilatory requirements, rather than a dialogue that allows

Neera to negotiate an approach to which she ascribes meaning. This will be discussed further in the discussion section.

Connected to the importance of dialogic opportunities is the importance of language skills. Language is the gatekeeper to dialogue, the necessary prerequisite to gaining access to negotiations. Like many of the other parents, Mandy stressed the importance of language skills in order to participate actively in her child's development. For instance, she explained that in the beginning, she had struggled to address the problems she encountered regarding her son's kindergarten. She told a story of how her son had been upset every day for some weeks because he had been teased by another boy. When asked about her approach to addressing these problems, she replied:

*Mandy: "I have become better than before. Before I was very careful. I wanted them to like me. But then I thought, no, this is my child."*

*Interviewer: "What do you think made you change [the way you approached the pedagogues]"*

*Mandy: "I was very careful in the way I explained things. So maybe it is because my Danish has become better and I can explain myself better than I could before."*

Mandy thus points to the ability to express oneself in Danish as a central prerequisite for having access to engaging in dialogue.

### ***Learning from mistakes***

Many parents explained that they learnt from their mistakes. For instance, one mother in the Parent Academy Program told a story of how, shortly after her arrival to Denmark, she had been in a local supermarket. Upon seeing a young child, she stooped down and spoke to the child, lightly caressing her face. The child's mother had reacted by scolding the immigrant woman, who had been very embarrassed. She explained that she had learnt through this mistake, that she should not make contact with other people's children in public spaces and consequently not to expect help from others either.

Many spoke of more severe mistakes. Ali, having moved to Denmark as a refugee from Lebanon in the 1980's, explained that he had found it very difficult to send his eldest son to daycare because he believed that it was important for a child to be with his mother during the first years. He and his wife had kept their son home until he was 3 years old after which they had tried to send him to kindergarten. Their son did not speak Danish very well and was very upset when they left him there. This resulted in the decision to keep him at home instead. However, Ali explains that he believes that this was a mistake because their son struggled when he had to start school. This mistake made them realize the importance of sending their other children to daycare and kindergarten, so that they were prepared for the challenges of school:

*Ali: "If I had the information that I have now about how things work, then I would have sent him to daycare with a pain in my heart. But I know that it is good for him, to prepare him for kindergarten and then school and so on."*

*[...]*

*Interviewer: "How did you get that understanding? How did you learn...?"*

*Ali: "It is because I have experienced it with my first child. I can see my child is insecure."*

Once again, this example questions the clear dichotomy between restrictive and expansive learning. Clearly, Ali had to compromise between his ideal of ensuring his child's closeness to the mother in the early years, as opposed to ensuring the necessary knowledge and competencies for one's child. The choice was considered meaningful for Ali, but not without sacrifice.

### ***Learning by expanding possibilities of participation structurally***

Parents also learnt from changes in the structural possibilities of participation. For instance, a leader of a daycare center, Mary, told a story of a mothers-meeting they facilitated regularly, which allowed mothers to meet and share experiences and discuss their challenges. This structural change which allowed for a more organized approach for parents to engage in dialogue with one another, created the opportunity for woman of Somali heritage to express her difficulties in making healthy food. Another woman offered to help her learn some new recipes and they agreed to meet and cook together regularly.

Another example of how structure and conditions created new possibilities of participation is given by Cemil, who explained that when their children were small his wife attended night school and later started working as a nurse with long hours. This meant that he took care of many of the domestic responsibilities that were not common for men to take care of in Turkey. For instance, he said:

*Cemil: I have never seen my father change a diaper. [...] I changed diapers, I took my children to daycare and school and picked them up, I cooked, vacuumed, washed clothes.*

*Interviewer: So the conditions forced you to do it?*

*Cemil: Yees, it had to be that way, but you get used to it.*

For Cemil, the conditions of practical life made him do fatherhood differently than his own father. But the change was meaningful for Cemil and his family as it allowed for his wife to work full time providing an adequate income for the family.

The parents thus described changes in their parenting practices that they ascribed meaning and through these changes were able to, at least partially, transcend marginalization. However, as we shall see in the following section, many parents also had difficulties regarding their parenting practices. These parents did not lack knowledge (in a cognitive verbalizable sense) of how to go about parenting differently, but rather were frequently severely challenged by structural double binds that, in their perspective, restricted their possibilities of being, what they deemed 'good' parents. A double bind is a concept developed by Bateson (1972) and describes contradictory demands that actors/participants have to deal with.

## **Restrictive Learning**

### ***Structure***

Many of the parents expressed certain frustrations over their conditions. For instance, in the Parent Academy Program, one father lamented that the school had given all the pupils I-pads as a learning device. The pupils were allowed to bring the I-pads home which created a difficult situation for this father who struggled to get his child to sleep at night because she would sneak her I-pad under her bedcovers. This resulted in a daughter who was difficult to get up in the mornings. A mother likewise complained that it was difficult to get her children to bed at an appropriate time because the youth clubs were open until 10 pm making it difficult for her to insist that her children were home before that hour. Cemil expressed distress about the pace of life where both mother and father had to work in order to earn a sufficient income resulting in very little time to be together as a family. He explained that he felt that family-life was exhausting, like running a marathon, and when comparing it to his childhood in Turkey he said:

*"We spent time together. It shouldn't sound like people don't do anything in Turkey [...] but it was as though everyone was more close, and people helped each other [...]. They help each other. But here, you have to do it on your own."*

### ***Lack of parental authority and discipline***

Connected to the structural organization of society and family life in Denmark, parents explained that a central dilemma in their parenting practices was the issue of how to discipline their children and create authority without the possibility of strict parenting and corporal punishment. For many parents this was connected to the difficulty of guiding their children and helping them behave well. At the Parent Academy Program the well-known term "negotiator children" was introduced to describe that children do not do as their parents say but insist on questioning and negotiating terms and conditions rather than adhering to the authority of the parents. This more lenient parenting practice was for many parents not an approach that they condoned, but felt forced into due to fear of severe repercussions from the municipality authorities. Cemil explained:

*Cemil: I do my best, but unfortunately, and it is not only mine, but I cannot say to my daughter, "Hey, there is this party but you cannot go," or "Hey, take care of yourself, you aren't allowed to drink alcohol." [...] In my opinion she shouldn't be allowed out until she was 25 years old, but unfortunately it doesn't work that way. If my father had said to me, "Hey, don't drink alcohol" or "Don't date that girl", I would have accepted it. But if I say that, then immediately a clever man will say, "Hey you are in Denmark and you are pressuring your kids." They are my kids. But they can take away the child. I don't think it makes sense.*

*Interviewer: Have you been worried that they will take away your children?*

*Cemil: Yes, 100%, 100%. But I do it for my kids. I want them to behave.*

Cemil is thus worried that if he makes high demands of his children and has clear rules and a strict approach to fatherhood, the authorities may take away his children.

At the Parent Academy Program two mothers from Somalia told a similar story of their friend who had a teenage son who would not help with domestic chores. She decided to discipline him by shutting him out of the apartment until he was ready to help. He reacted by threatening to call their social worker and inform her of this harsh parenting approach. The two mothers used



the story to explain how the constant fear of the municipality authorities and the risk of having one's children removed was a factor that made it very difficult for them to create authority and make their children do as they were asked.

Nilusha did not have this problem. She is married to a man born in India but adopted by a Danish family and consequently has an approach to parenting which is very typical in Denmark. Nilusha explained that when their children came home from school, her husband was very keen on making sure that they had time to relax and did not feel any pressure or exhaustion. Nilusha believes that this is a far too indulgent approach and insists on asking her children as soon as they come home whether they have any homework. She insists on discipline even when her husband thinks she is too harsh. It is, however, important to recognize that Nilusha, an educated engineer from India married to a Danish man, is not in the same vulnerable social position as Cemil, the two Somali mothers and other parents who expressed the same concerns and distress about being limited in the possibilities for exercising their authority as parents.

### ***Lack of care/responsibility for adults***

Many of the parents lamented the Danish individualized culture where the individual is considered more important than the family. For instance, many of the parents explained how it was customary for children to take care of their parents, sometimes on becoming adults themselves, but many whilst they are still children. For instance, Neera explained that whilst living in a refugee camp in Uganda it was her responsibility, despite her young age, to make sure they had drinking water by walking to the pump 4-5 kilometers away at 4 am and carrying 20 liters of water, in order to help her mother. Some of the parents felt that, what they believed to be an indulging approach to parenting that undermined parental authority, impaired the sense of responsibility for the family because it resulted in children who were selfish and only interested in their own concerns and desires. One mother from Somalia explained that when she was a child she would always ask her mother how she was and try to help her, but her own children did not take care of her if she was not feeling well. Cemil explained by saying:

*"My father, mother and siblings, we are very close, and if something happens to them, it is as if it happens to me. But here, in general, it is not only my children, everyone is more cold to each other. It is like there isn't as much love."*

Some of the parents thus felt forced into a more indulging and individualized approach to parenting which they did not ascribe value. Instead they lamented the absence of discipline and the lack of feeling of family responsibility and closeness which they saw as a result of this approach.

## **DISCUSSION**

Through the interviews, it became clear that changing parenting practices, negotiating these and struggling to become a certain kind of parent, requires time. The possibility of making mistakes and learning through addressing particular challenges is important. Additionally, language skills and the ability to communicate with others is likewise important. Coll et. al. (2002) compared the parental involvement practices of Portuguese, Dominican and Cambodian immigrants in the United states and likewise pointed out that language comfort was a central

factor for involvement. Additionally, they showed that Cambodian refugees were far less involved than Portuguese and Dominican immigrants for a number of reasons. A central reason was that newly arrive immigrants from Portugal and the Dominican Republic joined long-established communities who had "...learned to navigate the United States educational system and can serve as role models and funds of knowledge for newcomers." (Coll, et. al., 2002, p. 320). Besides stressing that access to network is important, it also underscores the point that time and patience as well as the acceptance of mistakes for newly arrived immigrants who do not have well established communities is necessary for the process of changing parenting practices and finding ways of navigating in new systems. It also highlights a need to create network and support for these parents as a way of reducing the amount of insights made through mistakes.

For the immigrant and refugee parents at the Parent Academy Program and those interviewed, access to experiencing how others went about the practice of parenting was likewise of great importance. Both the opportunity of seeing how others interact with their children and how they solve every-day parenting challenges, as well as drawing on their experiences from their own families was central for their learning experiences. Just as the butcher apprentices described by Lave and Wenger (1991) were inhibited in their learning through the impediment of access, these parent's possibilities of learning different ways of parenting is tightly interwoven with their possibilities of access to other parenting-practices.

Likewise, it is important for the parents to access to the opportunity to discuss with other parents or pedagogical personnel, the particular prevalent parenting problems and challenges that they are dealing with which need to be addressed in new ways. These opportunities of discussion make new kinds of relationships possible, as in the case where the two mothers started to cook together. Dialogue also helps the parents work out new ways of handling the particular issues that they are dealing with. Just as importantly, however, dialogue helps make it clear for both parents and pedagogical personnel which possible structural changes that may be helpful. An important point here, is that dialogue is not about teaching parents new parenting practices based on an assumption of deficit parenting skills. As pointed out in the analysis, these parents do not necessarily lack knowledge in a cognitive and verbalizable sense, but rather are caught in structural double binds and are dealing with real and challenging problems. As Lave (2011) points out: "Subjects, objects, lives and worlds are made in their relations..." (p. 152). In order to understand the struggles of parents it is important to consider how these are connected to and produced in relation to structures, objects and other persons. Dialogue is not a context free conversation free from power and struggle, and can thus not be an end point. Instead dialogue may be the point of departure, or the foundation on which both parents and pedagogical personnel can build solutions that take the complexity of the challenges into account.

This means, that rather than trying to change parents' knowledge in a cognitive sense by teaching them new parenting practices that are considered 'good', we need to consider the complexity of the particular problems that they are dealing with. In this way, parents can be supported in finding ways of doing parenthood in a new context that is considered meaningful to them. This requires considering the question of what parenting practices that they have access to, their individual experiences as well as the structures surrounding them, paying attention to the specific double binds that make their parenting difficult. Also, it is important to

maintain a vigilant and pervasive ambition of broadening possibilities of ways of being parents in order to ensure the possibility of maintaining values and practices that these parents deem important. Changing parenting practices and transcending marginalization should not equate doing parenting in the exact way middleclass ethnic Danish parents do. This is too narrow a perspective on good parenting (Crozier & Davies, 2007). As Packer and Gonicea (2000) point out, the difference between simple socialization or acculturation and learning is that learning is not merely a question of unreflectively adopting norms and jargon. Instead it is about becoming someone else, i.e. changing one's way of being in the world in a way that one ascribes meaning. It thus relates to identity. Learning has to do with coming into existence as a new person, i.e. coming to be. Changes in parenting practices must therefore be deemed meaningful by the parents. However, much of the narratives of the interviewed parents in this article are narratives of how they learned to do parenting as mainstream parents in a way that is recognized as appropriate, adequate and 'good' from an institutional perspective. In some cases, the parents explicitly pointed out the struggles and the oppressive processes of cultural structures and norms. Rarely did they narrate about how the institutional practices changed, merely their own practices. The articles sustained focus on change as necessary risks overlooking certain power dynamics and marginalization processes inherently interwoven into this longing for change. Therefore, further research into these processes of change with careful analysis of power structures and moment to moment interactional becoming is necessary to expand our understanding of how change and transcending marginalization can be supported in a way that does not merely imply submissive assimilation.

In a sense this article builds on a very timid theory of change. It acknowledges that persons live their lives in historically produced, structured practices that are not easily changed. But as Mehan (1992) argues, "Culture is not merely a pale reflection of structural forces; it is a system of meaning that mediates social structure and human action (p. 3). Persons are thus not enslaved to or bound by structures, but can, in meaningful ways, create actions and pathways that may not necessarily dissolve structurally created double binds but may in significant ways open up for other and hitherto unknown ways of being parents. In another sense this is a radical theory of change because it does not suggest changing parents by teaching them how to parent differently. Instead it suggests changing both institutional and family practices in a way that patiently allows for trying and failing, that opens up to accessing other persons from which to learn from both dialogically and experientially and insists on challenging the boundaries for what it means to be a 'good' parent. It is thus an inherently social theory of change.

## CONCLUSION

Immigrant and refugee parents need to learn to do parenting differently when they arrive in a new country. This process of learning to do parenting differently is not merely a process of acquiring certain cognitive knowledge or unreflectively take on the customs and norms of the culture to which they have arrived. This means that teaching parenting practices in a traditional classroom setting may not be the best way of supporting these parents. The article has argued that interventions that, based on deficit assumptions of immigrant and refugee parenting practices, attempt to teach skills and know-how adhere to a too narrow understanding of what parenting is. At the same time, we cannot stop at this critique. This would mean leaving these parents on their own to sort out the dilemmas and challenges that they meet – a kind of individualized problem solving where there is no support or lifeline. Instead it has been argued

that it is important to consider processes of change where parents ascribe meaning to new parenting practices through active, situated and relational approach to learning. In supporting these parents, it is important to address particular dilemmas and problems, pay attention to the structural arrangements and consider the conflicts and double binds that impinge upon the families in their transcending marginalization endeavors.

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